

High Blood Pressure

Facts for Older Adults
with High Blood Pressure



This brochure was produced by Pfizer and RAND to improve the quality of care for older adults.

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High Blood Pressure

A common disease affecting 35% of people over 65 years of age

What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure – also known as hypertension – is a condition of increased pressure in the arteries. It is a “silent” disease. That is, the patient usually does not know about the problem unless blood pressure measurements are done. If left untreated, high blood pressure can lead to serious medical problems such as coronary heart disease, heart attack, heart failure, stroke, kidney damage, or damage to the eyes.

What causes high blood pressure?

For most people with high blood pressure, the cause is unknown. But risk factors are known. Some of them you can change – being overweight or obese, heavy alcohol consumption, and inactive lifestyle.



Other risk factors, such as increasing age, gender, genetics, and race, also increase the chance of developing high blood pressure, but are unchangeable. For example, African Americans are more likely to develop high blood pressure than White Americans. Some people develop high blood pressure because they are sensitive to high-salt intake.



If you have diabetes or kidney disease, or have had a heart attack, your blood pressure is too high if it is 130/85 or higher.



The good news is that high blood pressure is almost always controllable. But once you get it down below 140/90 (or below 130/85 if you have diabetes or kidney disease, or have had a heart attack), that doesn't mean that you no longer have high blood pressure. It means that your blood pressure is now "controlled." Talk to your health-care provider about how to keep it in good control.

When I first find out I have high blood pressure, are there tests I should have done?

When your doctor diagnoses high blood pressure, he or she may suggest tests to find out whether the high blood pressure has caused harm to parts of your body. The test can also find out why you have high blood pressure. Your doctor will tell you what tests are right for you. One test that everyone with newly discovered high blood pressure should have is an electrocardiogram in order to assess for effects of the high blood pressure on the heart and to guide therapy. This is a simple heart test that is easily done in the doctor's office or clinic.



What numbers do I need to know?

When your doctor told you that you have high blood pressure, he or she probably said that your blood pressure was 140 over 90, or higher. Usually this is written as 140/90.



The first number is called the "systolic" pressure. The second number is called the "diastolic" pressure. The systolic pressure is the amount of pressure in the arteries while the heart is beating. The diastolic pressure is the amount of pressure in the arteries when the heart is resting between beats.



Facts About High Blood Pressure You Can Use

The first step to lowering blood pressure is changing your lifestyle

Many studies have proven the benefits of certain lifestyle changes in lowering blood pressure in older adults with mild hypertension. Losing weight, reducing salt intake, and increasing physical activity helps many people control their blood pressure, and may eliminate the need to take medications. Some-times, losing as little as 5 to 10 pounds can reduce your blood pressure.



Drug therapy can lower your blood pressure too

For people who cannot control their blood pressure by lifestyle changes, taking blood pressure medica-

tion can lower blood pressure. Some people who continue lifestyle changes while they take blood pressure medication are able to reduce medication dosage or even stop medication entirely because of the success of their lifestyle changes.

Lowering blood pressure helps reduce stroke, coronary heart disease, and death

High blood pressure is a well-known risk factor for more serious conditions, such as stroke and heart attack. High blood pressure affects the blood vessels that feed the heart, as well as the heart itself. That's why lowering your blood pressure is so important. Lowering your blood pressure reduces the occurrence of stroke by as much as 36%, heart attacks by as much as 25%, and death by about 12%.



Your medication works best when you take it as prescribed by your doctor

If you need to take medication to control your blood pressure, there are many choices.

These medications work in different ways and differ in the number of times per day you need to take them. Medications do not work the same for everyone. You and your doctor will need to find what's right for you.

Your medication only works when you remember to take it. Some medications need to be taken three times a day, some twice a day, and some only once a day. If you are having difficulty remembering to take your medication, talk to your doctor about the right medication and dosing schedule for you.

Remember, since high blood pressure is a “silent disease” without warning signs or symptoms, it is important to take your medication as prescribed by your physician. Do not stop taking your medication without first speaking to your doctor.



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